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ABSTRACT

Because of the high and rising numbers of adult students of English as a Second Language (ESL), the need for qualified teachers is strong. Instructors need to know how to work with a learner population that is diverse in race, culture, native language, economic status, motivation, and educational background. They also need to know how adults learn best and how instruction can best facilitate this learning, and in particular, how adults learn a second language. An inquiry-based model for staff development, using systematic, intentional teacher research on school and classroom work addresses a number of professional development concerns for this population. Federal and state initiatives provide some support for staff development programs and resources, a number of states (including California, Illinois, Texas, Massachusetts, and Virginia) have notable programs. Some of the challenges to good staff development are minimal state and local certification requirements, the part-time nature of adult instruction, high staff turnover rates due to working conditions, a limited research base for adult instruction, and limited resources. Promising practices for staff development include distance education and electronic networking. Contains 28 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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ERIC Q & A

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Trends in Staff Development for Adult ESL Instructors

by Miriam Burt and Fran Keenan
National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education

English as a second language (ESL) instruction has become an important part of the adult education field in the final decades of the 20th century. U.S. Department of Education statistics (1997) indicate that nearly as many ESL learners enrolled (1,439,237) in adult education as did adult basic education (ABE) learners (1,509,065). What is more, 70% of the adult education programs across the country offer some ESL instruction (Fitzgerald, 1995). Because of these high numbers of adults learning English, the need for qualified teachers is strong and projected to continue.

What training do adult ESL instructors need? How are some states addressing this training need? What are the challenges they face? This Q&A will answer those questions as it looks at trends in staff development for adult ESL instructors.

What do instructors need to know?

Instructors need to know how to work with a learner population that is diverse in race, culture, native language, economic status, motivation for learning the language, and educational background. The population includes highly educated professionals from Europe or Latin America, farmers and nomadic tribes members from the Middle East or Southeast Asia who have never been to school and who are illiterate in their own language, and many who fall in between the extremes (Shank & Terrill, 1995). At the same time, ESL teachers need to know the following things:

1. *How adults learn best and how instruction can best facilitate this learning.* Some principles of adult learning include:

- New knowledge has to be integrated with previous knowledge; that requires active learner participation.
- Collaborative modes of teaching and learning enhance the self-concepts of those involved and result in more meaningful and effective learning.
- Adult learning is facilitated when teaching activities promote question asking and answering, problem finding, and problem solving.
- Adult skill learning is facilitated when individual learners can assess their own skills and strategies to discover inadequacies or limitations for themselves. (Dewar, 1996).

2. *How adults learn a second language.* The factors that contribute to the learning of a second language are complex. They include, but are not limited to, degree of literacy in the first language, type and amount of previous formal education, whether the first language uses the Roman alphabet system or not, the age and cultural background of the learner, and the learner's motivation for learning the language (Holt, 1995; Shank & Terrill, 1995).

3. *How to teach others from a variety of cultures.* Research about how to teach English language and literacy to adults shows the need for a variety of instructional approaches to meet the needs of very diverse learners (Peyton & Crandall, 1995; Wrigley & Ewen, 1995).

Few practitioners have been trained in all three areas: adult learning theory, the "complexities of second language acquisition," and in how to teach individuals from another culture (U.S. Congress, 1993, p. 171).

What is effective staff development?

A study done for the U.S. Department of Education (Kutner, 1992) found that the most successful training for teachers and volunteers working with adult learners was "ongoing, extensive," had a "solid theoretical basis," and was that which the teachers themselves helped "plan, implement, and evaluate" (p. 2). Another study showed that the highest success rate for staff development occurred when participants tried out the new skill on the job with their students and received feedback and peer coaching from a support group (Joyce & Weil, 1996).

Literature on staff development for adult educators has pointed to the need for adequate time for inquiry, reflection, and teacher collaboration (Foucar-Szocki, et al., 1997; Kutner, 1992). An evaluation study of the Virginia adult education professional system found that "practitioners consistently say that they want to learn with others" (Foucar-Szocki, et al., 1997, p. 78). Teachers want to be part of a learning community.

These concerns are addressed in an inquiry-based model of staff development, which uses teacher research or "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" as a central activity (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 471). With this model, teachers have the opportunity to share with other teachers what they have learned from their research (Drennon, 1994). They also have opportunities to "experience, reflect, and apply what they learn" (Bingman & Bell, 1995, pp. 31-32).

What are some national efforts and policies?

In the 1991 National Literacy Act amendments to the Adult Education Act, Section 353 mandates that states set aside 15% of their Basic State Grant funds for teacher training and demonstration projects and that two-thirds of this amount must be used for teacher training. In Fiscal Year 1994, for example, states distributed $11 million dollars to adult education programs, community colleges, and other organizations for 353 projects. A little more than seven million dollars of it went to teacher training (RMC Research Corporation, 1995).

The advent of adult education system reform efforts such as program quality indicators (required by the National Literacy Act), the Office of Vocational and Adult Education's (OVAE) Results-Based Reporting System (development of a national reporting system of outcome measures that document student performance), and the National Institute for Literacy's (NIFL) Equipped for the Future (grassroots standards-based system reform which looks at what adult learners need to know in their roles as family members,

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workers, and community members) have focused considerable attention on the need for improved staff development. These efforts demand increasingly sophisticated adult education program accountability and this, in turn, depends on well-trained teachers.

State literacy resource centers (SLRC) have also been a vehicle for professional development. They are a network of information and technical assistance centers that were established by the National Literacy Act to coordinate adult education and adult ESL resources and promote staff development. Unfortunately, federal funding for these centers was discontinued by Congress in 1995; those still in operation struggle to secure state and private funding and continue their activities.

What are some activities in key states?

In 1996, the states with the highest enrollments of adults studying English as a second language were, in descending order, California, Florida, Texas, New York, and Illinois (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Some staff development activities in these and other states are described below.

California

California, the state with the greatest number of adult ESL learners, provides technical assistance, communication linkage, and information to adult educators through its Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN). OTAN is funded by Section 353 monies. It facilitates the educational use of software and technology in the adult education classroom. The Staff Development Institute of California, another 353 project, provides training to ABE and ESL teachers and administrators on such topics as cultural diversity in the literacy classroom, essential elements of ESL instruction in adult education, and planning an ESL multilevel lesson. More information is available on their website at http://www.otan.dni.us/webfarm/sdi/.

Illinois

In Illinois, the Adult Learning Resource Center (ALRC) in Des Plaines offers staff development to adult ESL programs throughout the state. Twice a year, the ALRC provides a variety of adult ESL staff development activities for teachers and administrators through regional workshops. Staff development workshops for ESL instructors include teaching non-literate ESL students, cultural awareness in the classroom, and Internet basics. The ALRC also provides on-site workshops, staff consultations by phone or in person, materials, software bibliographies, and library resources. The ESL page of the ALRC website (http://www.center.affect.org/ALRC/index.html) lists resources and discusses classroom activities such as using pictures with pre-literate learners. The site also has links to other ESL websites.

Texas

In Texas, the Adult Education Professional Development and Curriculum Consortium has been funded by 353 grants since 1993. Each organizational member focuses on one aspect of staff development (for example, one might provide training in assessment techniques, another in curriculum development). According to Patricia DeHesus-Lopez of consortium member Texas A&M University, the group tries to ensure that staff development is thorough, ongoing, effective, and accessible to practitioners statewide. It also tries to integrate distance learning and technology and professional development. Its web address is http://www.cdlr.tamu.edu/tcal/liaison.htm.

One consortium training initiative is Project IDEA (Institute for the Development of Educators). Its goal is to develop local capacity for reflective, inquiry-based teacher training. For educators and administrators involved in this training, Project IDEA is a year-long process that begins with a three-day institute after which participants chose a topic to research. Through the year, participants work on their individual projects, communicating with one another and with their facilitators in person and through listservs.

Other professional development is implemented through the state system for interactive video, made available through the Texas Educational Television Network (TETN). TETN broadcasts trainings to the regional service centers on such subjects as family literacy or legal and technical information for administrators. Consortium advisory council meetings have been held through interactive video via TETN.

Massachusetts

Although Massachusetts does not rank among the top 5 states in numbers of adult immigrant learners, urban areas such as Boston have many ESL learners. It is estimated that more than 12% of the adult population may need ESL services (Chisman, Wrigley, & Ewen, 1993). Further, in Massachusetts, unlike in most states, staff development *is* a paid and required activity for adult educators: Massachusetts mandates that full-time educators receive 50 hours per year of paid release time for staff development and this is prorated for part-time instructors.

The umbrella for staff development in Massachusetts is the 353-funded System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES). SABES is a comprehensive professional-development and technical-assistance initiative. Through a central resource center at World Education and five regional support centers at community colleges, it offers workshops, consultation, mini-courses, new teacher orientations, practitioner research groups, teacher sharing groups, a statewide newsletter featuring practitioners' writing, and other professional development. Because one-time-only trainings are not as effective as those that are ongoing and based on the expressed needs of the educators, needs assessment of teachers is done regularly. One of these centers, the Adult Literacy Resource Institute (ALRI), a joint effort of Roxbury Community College and UMASS Boston, maintains an extensive website of ABE and ESL resources for practitioners and a large lending library of resource materials. This website can be reached via the SABES website at http://www.sabes.org.

Massachusetts has used distance education for staff development. In 1994, the state funded a series of interactive cable programs and videos for adult ESL staff development that were produced by the Massachusetts Corporation for Educational Television (MCET) working with SABES.

Also based in Massachusetts, Eastern LINCS (Literacy Information Communication System)—one of four regional technology hubs funded by NIFL—has the goal of supporting the adult literacy community's effort to access and use the Internet. One of Eastern LINCS's projects promotes ESL staff development by training teachers to publish resources on the Eastern LINCS website at http://hub1.worlded.org/.

Virginia

Like many other states, Virginia is now focusing its staff development for adult educators on building learning communities through practitioner networks. The state uses 353 monies to fund the following staff development activities. The Center for Professional Development plans and offers training at the local and state level. The Adult Education and Literacy Resource Centers has a lending library of over 10,000 titles including videos, software, and non-commercial materials, as well as a website of information about professional development and links to other adult education web pages. The Virginia Adult Institutes for Lifelong Learning (VAILL) are two-day statewide summer institutes for adult educators. One of these institutes has an

ESL focus. The Virginia Adult Educators' Research Network supports practitioner research by offering technical assistance and a stipend to practitioners to pursue their own research questions. A quarterly publication, the *Progress for Adult Learning in Virginia* provides information about state, regional, and local training activities (Foucar-Szocki, et al., 1997). The Resource Centers have recently completed a project that will be used in staff development for adult ESL educators. The *ESL Starter Kit* provides information on registration procedures, learner assessment, needs assessment, and working with multilevel classes and will be available online later this year http://www.vcu.edu/aelweb/.

What are some challenges to good staff development?

In 1993, a federal report entitled *Adult Literacy and New Technologies: Tools for a Lifetime* (U.S. Congress) outlined the following challenges to good staff development: "minimal state and local policies and certification requirements; limited in-service requirements; the part-time nature of adult education teachers and volunteer instructors; the high rate of staff turnover; the lack of a unified research base on best practices; and limited financial resources for training" (p. 171). All of this is especially true for those adult educators who teach English as a second language (Crandall, 1993; Florez, 1997).

Minimal Certification Requirements

State by state, requirements for teaching adult ESL vary, however, most states require far less training of those who teach adults than they do of those who teach children (U.S. Congress, 1993). Some states require an elementary or secondary school teaching certificate, and some, only a Bachelor's degree. Many do not require any coursework on adult learning theory. At the same time, a scarcity in degree programs that offer a concentration in adult ESL education (Florez, 1997) makes it impractical to require specific academic qualifications of adult ESL teachers.

Part-time Nature of Adult Instruction

For most adult ESL teachers, staff development or training tends to consist of *voluntary attendance* at one- or two-day workshops, conferences, or seminars rather than participation in long-term professional development or teacher-researcher activities (Crandall, 1993; Kutner, 1992). Adult educators are not unlike the adult learners in their classrooms. They frequently have busy lives and find it hard to pursue additional training or education. Unlike most K-12 educators, teaching is often not their only or even their main job. In fact, 90% work part time, are paid on an hourly basis, and do not receive benefits (U.S. Congress, 1993). Some are full-time K-12 educators by day and part-time adult educators by night. Others use several classes, taught throughout the day and evening at different locations, to create a full-time position. Some may have an unrelated primary job and teach adults in the evening for extra funds. Still others have the primary responsibility of a home and family during the day and evening, with minimal hours to devote to teaching, let alone their own professional development. It is likewise difficult for programs to make many demands of a part-time work force.

Turnover

Given that a majority of adult ESL instructors work without contract or benefits, a high rate of staff turnover is not surprising (Crandall, 1993). Adult ESL programs are continually hiring new teachers, who, of course, need training.

Limited Research Base

Until the middle of this century, little attention was given to the differences between adults and children as learners. Then, in the 1960s, educator Malcolm Knowles coined the word, and hence the field, of *andragogy*, a theory of adult learning which suggests that "adults expect learner-centered settings where they can set their own goals and organize their own learning around their present life needs" (Donaldson, Flannery, & Ross-Gordon, 1993, p. 148). However, within adult education overall, much remains to be researched about how adults learn best. There is still debate in the field about the need for different approaches for teaching adults and children, and some educators maintain that all good teaching, whether for children or adults, is responsive in nature (Imel, 1995).

Although much is known about language and effective practice, many unanswered questions remain. An ESL research agenda has recently been developed by the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy with input from the field (NCLE, 1998). It sets forth clear priorities for research that will improve the effectiveness of adult ESL programs. One of the major categories addressed is teacher preparation and staff development.

Limited Resources

The major federal source of funding for staff development in adult education is the 353 monies. A study of adult education programs (RMC Research Corporation, 1995) found that Section 353 funds were virtually the sole source of support for staff training and program improvement in FY 91-94.

What practices are promising?

Professional development opportunities via distance education–in the form of online Internet courses and seminars–have been multiplying in the last several years for many disciplines including ESL education (Warschauer, 1995). Several institutions are offering online courses in ESL methodology including Brigham Young University (Utah), the New School for Social Research (New York City), the University of Southern Florida, and the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Extension program. All of these courses are part of graduate or certificate programs.

The Internet, with its listservs, newsgroups, and electronic mail, and the World Wide Web (with its audio and video capabilities) make possible the building of communities in electronic space. This capability may be a key component in developing effective online adult ESL staff development.

Conclusion

There is a clear need for staff development for adult ESL instructors. Limitations of time and resources for this training exist. The use of technology in distance education as well as the proliferation of reflective inquiry staff development initiatives are promising practices that may begin to overcome the challenges and meet the need.

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SABES: http://www.sabes.org

The Staff Development Institute: http://www.otan.dni.us/webfarm/sdi

The Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Resource Centers http://www.vcu.edu/aelweb/

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